LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:

June 9, 2003

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LAST WEEK

LEGISLATION OF NOTE

The following Bills of significance to NRCS and conservation have been introduced:

Bill	Sponsor	Purpose
H. R. 2310	Rahall, WV	To protect, conserve, and restore native fish, wildlife,
		and their natural habitats on Federal lands and non-
		Federal lands through cooperative, incentive-based
		grants to control, mitigate and eradicate harmful non-
		native species, and for other purposes.

FARM BILL IMPLEMENTATION HEARING - The House Agriculture Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, and Rural Development and Research (Chairman Lucas, OK) held a public hearing on Wednesday, June 4, to review conservation technical assistance and the implementation of the Conservation Title of the 2002 Farm Bill. Deputy Secretary James Moseley was a witness. NRCS Chief Bruce Knight and FSA Administrator James Little accompanied the Deputy Secretary and responded to questions from Members of the Subcommittee.

Deputy Secretary Moseley testified regarding the USDA conservation programs and specifically the technical assistance necessary to help farmers and ranchers. He provided the history, challenges, and future direction on technical assistance programs.

Chairman Lucas (OK) asked about the impact of current CRP signup on technical assistance on other programs such as EQIP. Other questions brought forth involved the Regional Equity provisions of the 2002 Farm Bill, Farm and Ranch Land Protection allocations in several states, and if the Grassland Reserve Program would be a national program this year. Deputy Secretary Moseley indicated the GRP would be a national program with signups beginning soon.

Another issue brought forth was the continual expansion of the Ground and Surface Water Program through EQIP. Chief Knight indicated this program would continue to expand as opportunities to meet the goals of the program were presented.

Rep. Tim Holden (PA) asked about the Conservation Security Program timetable. Deputy Secretary Moseley indicated that 4,500 comments were received on the advanced notice of proposed rule and that an interim rule was expected before the end of the year.

Other witness panels of conservation and farming groups testified supporting the need for technical assistance and indicated the necessity of sufficient technical assisted to address all conservation needs, including financial assistance programs.

COMBEST RETIRES, NEW MEMBER ELECTED - Rep. Larry Combest (TX) officially retired May 31. Rep. Combest was the past Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee. Randy Neugebauer was elected June 3 in a special runoff election to fill the 19th District seat vacated by Combest. Rep. Neugebauer was officially sworn in on June 5.

TRIBAL FISH AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS FULL

COMMITTEE HEARING - On Tuesday, June 3, the Senate Indian Affairs Committee (Chairman Campbell, CO) held a hearing on tribal fish and wildlife management programs and the impact of programs in the Pacific Northwest. The panels consisted of members of tribal fish and wildlife commissions. They expressed concerns ranging from inadequate funding levels, staff retention issues, recovery plan challenges, and the impact on the health of tribes due to the lack of available fish for their diet.

THIS WEEK

EPA GRANTS MANAGEMENT SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING - The Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee (Chairman Duncan, TN) of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee will hold a hearing titled "EPA Grants Management: Persistent Problems and Proposed Solutions." This hearing was originally scheduled for April 8.

June 11 10:00 a.m. 2167 Rayburn Building

CALFED OVERSIGHT HEARING – The Water and Power Subcommittee (Chairman Calvert, CA) of the House Resources Committee will hold an oversight hearing on authorities and discretion provided to federal agencies meeting goals and objectives of the CALFED program, a joint federal-state project in California that funds efforts to improve the San Francisco Bay-Delta area ecosystem.

June 12 10:00 a.m. 1334 Longworth Building

LOOKING AHEAD

RESOURCES LAND BILLS MARKUP - The House Resources Committee (Chairman Pombo, CA) will mark up pending bills that deal with issues of developing comprehensive water strategies, the settlement of water rights claims, bridge construction adjacent to Folsom Dam, and to amend the Reclamation Projects Authorization and Adjustment Act of 1992.

Date TBA Time TBA 1334 Longworth Building

QUALITY OF FINANCIAL INFORMATION AT AGRICULTURE, EDUCATION DEPARTMENTS AND AID OVERSIGHT HEARING – The Government Efficiency and Financial Management Subcommittee (Chairman Platts, PA) of the House Government Reform Committee will hold an oversight hearing titled "Fixing the Financials – Featuring United States Department of Agriculture, Department of Education and U.S. Agency for International Development."

Date TBA Time TBA 2154 Rayburn Building

WESTERN WATER ISSUES OVERSIGHT HEARING – The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee (Chairman Domenici, NM) will hold an oversight hearing on the Interior Department programs that address western water issues. This hearing was originally scheduled for May 6.

Date TBA Time TBA 366 Dirksen Building